

Exercising in Comfort: Islamicate Culture of *Mahremiyet* in Everyday Istanbul

Sertaç Sehlikoglu

Bio: Dr. Sehlikoglu is a social anthropologist based at the University of Cambridge, working on leisure, gender, and subjectivity in Turkey and the Middle East. Her works have been published in edited collections and in peer-reviewed journals including *Leisure Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, and *The Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*.

Abstract: Women's control of their bodily movements, especially in the Islamicate contexts of the Middle East, constitutes a multi-layered process of building privacy, heterosexuality, and intimacy. Physical exercise, however, with the extensive body movements it requires, problematizes women's ability to control their public sexuality. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2011 and 2012 in Istanbul, this paper explores the everyday concerns of Istanbulite women who seek "rahatlık" (comfort) during exercise, a word they constantly used when referring to women-only spaces within the culture of *mahremiyet* (intimacy, privacy). This paper furthers the scholarship on Muslim sexualities by suggesting that to understand the diversity of women's concerns regarding their public sexualities and examining the boundary-making dynamics in the culture of *mahremiyet*. I argue that *mahremiyet* operates as an institution of intimacy that provides a metacultural intelligibility for heteronormativity, based on sexual scripts, normative spaces, and gendered acts.

Keywords: intimacy, sexuality, exercise, Turkey, public sphere, Islam

Exercising in a "*rahat*" (comfortable) environment, as often put by women when referring to their choice for women-only gyms, is the central concern of a diverse body of interlocutors I met during the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in 2011 and 2012 in Istanbul, Turkey. Depending on the context, *rahat* may refer to a place or a state that men will not disturb women (*rahatsız etmek*) or women feel comfortable (*rahat hissetmek*) and they will not be perceived as *rahat kadın* (literally, "comfortable woman", a Turkish expression referring to a seductive or promiscuous woman). Directly linked to their ideas and self-control of public sexuality, women achieved *rahatlık* (comfort) through multiple techniques in everyday life: gender segregation, the company of female friend(s), having control of bodily movements in public, and avoiding anything that will make them feel *rahatsız* (uncomfortable). Physical exercise in public spaces presents a challenge to women's pursuit of comfort by making their bodily movements visible. Sibel, one of my interlocutors, articulated the possible immodesty and sexualization of the kinds of movements involved, for example, in aerobics as "*bedroom movements*." What are the specificities of exercise that trouble women's concerns about their modesty in public?

This article is concerned with women's recurrent use of the word *rahat* to refer to their feelings when struggling to express their choice of men-free environments to exercise.

Women's demand for segregated exercise, as this article suggests, should be linked to their control of (unruly) public sexuality and women's concerns could better be explored in relation to the larger institution of intimacy and sexuality, that, in the context of Turkey, I refer to as the culture of *mahremiyet*. Mahremiyet is the Islamic notion of privacy and intimacy, which acts as a boundary-making mechanism. I explore the culture of *mahremiyet* that is constituted through cultural scripts, normative spaces, and gendered acts in the Islamicate contexts of the Middle East. In their edited volume entitled "Islamicate Sexualities", Babayan and Najmabadi (2008) suggest the term Islamicate in order "to highlight a complex of attitudes and practices that pertain to cultures and societies that live by various versions of the religion Islam" (p: ix). When studying the culture of *mahremiyet*, understanding Istanbul as an Islamicate context fits well with the diverse Muslimhoods of my interlocutors.

This article is based on 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork involving interviews with 42 exercising Istanbulite women as well as participant observation in which women, including many who did not become interviewees, shared moments of joy, excitement, and frustration with me as we sweated side by side. These women were from upper, middle, and lower-classⁱ backgroundsⁱⁱ and were between the ages of 18 and 62 during the time of this research (2011-2012). Some of them were devout Kemalistsⁱⁱⁱ while a few others were Islamist activists. What they all shared, however, were similar concerns about public sexuality that led them to seek modesty and women-only spaces to exercise^{iv}. I further investigated the daily techniques women used to meet certain social expectations in relation to public sexuality and institutions of intimacy through multiple techniques, which are overshadowed by contemporary political debates on headscarf.

I do not use the term "public sexuality" as an act of sex in public, but in order to refer to the making and remaking of (hetero)sexed bodies of women and men in public (and inevitably in private). The daily techniques I refer to are embedded not only in gender relations and gender constructions but also the multiple ways in which women implement their subjectivities. Such an approach seeks to address the broad question of what mechanisms enable, define, and differentiate particular forms of "comfort" in homosocial settings for women and the particularities of what these women mean by "comfort" when explaining their choice of women-only gyms. What is particular about segregation in an Islamicate context from the perspective of women? How do women shape, reshape and negotiate with the culture of *mahremiyet* in their everyday lives when they exercise? These questions also compel me to ask how the historical, cultural, religious and linguistic particularities of Turkey, as well as global visual interactions enabled by media tools, influence and shape women's privacy; specifically, the interaction between women's bodies and public space. It is, in this perspective and analysis, crucial to disentangle women's dynamic and multiple gendered subjectivities. By "multiple," amongst other dimensions of subjecthood, I refer to the work of Asma Afsaruddin (1999), and her call to "re-examine the notion of one grand paradigm of gender relations and gender exclusivity in cultures dominated by what are generally perceived to be Islamic/ate values" (4-5).

To address the proposed questions, it is crucial to pay attention to language, history and culture as constructing forces of sex and sexuality (Moore 1994). The analysis of *mahremiyet* revolves around women's own conceptualization and imagination. Therefore, it may not necessarily involve a theological or legal analysis *per se*. In other words, instead of centralizing the rules which contemporary popular figures of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence in Turkey (Islamic clerics such as Mustafa İslamoğlu, Nihat Hatipoğlu or Hayrettin Karaman) explain, or which the Quran and the Hadith lay out, I pay attention to how Islamic/ate culture informs the everyday lives of individuals. I aim to understand the relational mechanisms used to maintain the limits and boundaries between gendered bodies, construct femininity and womanhood through space-making, and regulate the relationship between sexes. I argue that the “discomfort” women refer to leads them to choose segregation, use multiple strategies to establish distance from the opposite sex. This is related not only to normality and (hetero)sexuality in Turkey as an Islamicate context, but also to the ways in which women need to deal with the fragility of their privacy in public, in an era where the institution of intimacy (Berlant 1998) is undergoing change.^v

***Mahremiyet* as an Institution of Intimacy**

Intimacy, in this paper, is not necessarily tied to romantic coupling but involves boundaries and borders of the gendered female body and the ways in which female heterosexuality and femininity are built and rebuilt, made and remade in everyday life, producing gendered knowledge and meaning (Moore 1988, Strathern 1990, Yanagisako and Collier 1987). I consider the culture of *mahremiyet* an institution of intimacy (Berlant and Warner 1998). Berlant and Warner discuss sex and sexuality as always “mediated by publics” and argue that heterosexual culture creates privacy in order to preserve its own coherency: “Heterosexual culture achieves much of its metacultural intelligibility through the ideologies and institutions of intimacy.” (Berlant and Warner 1998: 553). Berlant defines the institution of intimacy as something “created to stabilize” (Berlant 2000: 286) and “normalize particular forms of knowledge and practice and to create compliant subjects” (ibid: 288). Such an approach illuminates the roles of unspoken assumptions, techniques, expectations and non-verbal cues drawing the lines of intimacy observed in the multiple heterosocial and homosocial settings in which women engage in an activity— such as exercise — loaded with sexual appeal as explained in the following pages. In other words, in this framework segregation and the culture of *mahremiyet* are inherently public.

The word *mahremiyet* is not translatable into English. It suggests multiple words including privacy, secrecy and domesticity. Derived from the Arabic root *b-r-m*, the word *mahremiyet* literally refers to forbidden-ness and sacredness simultaneously. *Mahremiyet* refers to a notion of privacy and confidentiality, which the insider is expected to preserve and an outsider is expected not to violate. This insider/outsider dichotomy, however, is complex and multilayered. It does not neatly fit into the public/private dichotomy (Göle 1996). *Mahremiyet* is a mechanism that creates boundaries between spaces, individuals and within the body of

the individual. The question of *mahremiyet* and the prerogatives to infringe such boundaries is the focal point of this paper.

Mahremiyet, as a boundary-making mechanism, marks *mahrem*s (same-sex and related opposite sex individuals) as *insiders* and non-*mahrem* as *outsiders*. The regulatory and boundary-making nature of *mahremiyet* is embedded in Islamic jurisprudence that regulates marital relationships, a core part of culture entangled in everyday life. According to Islamic marital law, it is forbidden for two relatives of the opposite sex to marry and the word *mahrem*, forbidden, refers to this ban of intimate heterosexual relationship. The proximity of these two individuals of opposite sex is formed either by blood (ie. father and daughter), by marriage (father-in-law and daughter-in-law), or by breastfeeding/milk (ie. a woman and a man breastfed by the same woman)^{vi}. Although they are forbidden to marry, they are *mahrem*s to each other and thus have fewer boundaries in-between. In other words, forbidden-ness denotes and creates proximity and a familial intimacy.

In this vein, two non-*mahrem*s of opposite sex are expected to establish distance, follow codes of invisible boundaries, such as segregation, veiling, limited gaze and controlled behavior. By delineating basic principles of marriage, *mahremiyet* creates heterosexual barriers and regulates proximity and gendered intimacy at multiple levels. In this way, Islamicate sexualities are created and normalized in the everyday lives of individuals, including non-observant Muslims (Schlikoglu 2015b).

Gazing Produces Sexual Script

The boundaries created within the culture of *mahremiyet* are signified primarily by regulating *seeing*, or who can see whom^{vii} and how. In their everyday lives, women become aware of their sexed bodies in relation to different types of gazes: the male gaze, the female gaze, the foreign (non-*mahrem*/*namahrem*) gaze, the gaze of envy, etc. *Mahrem* boundaries are regulated in order not to attract a foreign gaze, which produces sexual scripts in public settings.

The gaze as a producer of a sexual script is an expansion of the psychoanalytical approach that considers gaze a love object, first argued by Freud and later expanded upon by Jacques Lacan (1981). Lacan adds two other objects to Freud's list of partial objects (breasts, faces, phallus): voice and gaze. It is therefore by no means accidental that gaze and voice are love objects *par excellence* –not in the sense that we fall in love with a voice or a gaze, but rather in the sense that they are a medium, a catalyst that sets off love^{viii}.

In the culture of *mahremiyet*, however, the gaze produces a sexual script that is more than a mere medium. As the term “sexual script” suggests (Simon and Gagnon 1986), gazing is entangled with larger cultural meanings, enabled by historical makings and maintained by intersubjective displays. Furthermore, the gaze has a clear and almost physical embodiment in the everyday life of the Middle East. In Turkey, the gaze has non-human agency with the capacity to bring misfortune or illness through *naẓar* (strong eye)^{ix} which is able to touch people (*naẓar değmesi*). The significance of the gaze we witness here is not fully reflected in Western theories such as Lacanian *le regard* (translated into English as gaze, almost exclusively). Lacanian *le regard* refers to looking or staring, often with desire; yet it does not

encapsulate the physicality of gaze in this particular context. In the following pages, I will revisit the ways in which my interlocutors negotiate different types of gazing in various spaces in daily life. Since gaze is imagined to be physical and concrete, there are powerful and ambient rules, emotions, or beliefs created around it^x. As such, in everyday life, the sensation of the gaze is experienced as tactile rather than visual.

In a culture that envisages (whence regulates) gaze as a physical object, the one who is looked at feels a “discomfort”, since the *mahrem* boundaries have been crossed, violated, and even *penetrated*. Looking, in this context, embodies more than curiosity, as it becomes an active, masculine, penetrating act against the passive, feminine, and penetrated position, as Dror Ze’evi (2006) lays out when he points out the duality embedded in the heterosexual culture of Ottoman society. The curious, penetrating gaze is therefore an intrapsychic reflection of the heterosexual active male. Aside from the sensorial dimension of intimacy, as I discuss below, the female is also positioned as penetrable, marking women’s privacies with fragility.

Harem: A Mahrem Space for Leisure

The culture of *mahremiyet* has adapted to new habits as particular leisure practices have become established in Turkey. In order to stay within the boundaries of the complex social rules regarding the gaze that *mahremiyet* demands, various space regulations emerged and were adapted as the solution to that complexity. Although it was predominantly androgenic fantasies that stimulated colonial interest in *harem* (Alloula 1986, Yeğenoğlu 1998), it has in fact been one of the main ways of regulating *mahrem* boundaries.

As opposed to the common misunderstanding, *harem* is a socialization zone of the *mahrem*s, of those who remain inside the borders created by the culture of *mahremiyet*. Thus, if the place in question is a household, the insiders who have access to the *harem* are not only women (as the common stereotype suggests), but also the male relatives such as fathers, daughters, sons, and siblings. The houses with a *harem* were predominantly upper and ruling-class households during Ottoman rule (Booth 2010, Brown 2011, Peirce 1993) and the uses of that space were aimed at regulating the gaze (Lad 2010). The location of a *harem* in the house was often situated where one could see other parts of the house (garden, main room) or outside, but outsiders could not see inside. In sum, as Booth (2010) brilliantly points out, the idea of the *harem* was in fact the *result* of a border-making mechanism, which still exists in Islamic contexts.

I agree with the call in Booth’s edited collection for a closer attention to the ways in which those borders are established, maintained, and threatened. “Islamic” rules are not enough to understand the culture of *mahremiyet* fully, as its historical, temporal, spatial and sociable dimensions complicate individuals’ (and in this case, women’s) relationship with it. Moreover, even when individuals have the interest and ability to apply particular Islamic interpretations regarding *mahremiyet* and its regulations, there are times they choose to ignore them. For instance, it is permissible for women to breastfeed in the presence of women and male relatives (i.e., brothers or father), yet, it is a highly unusual practice. On the other hand,

despite the prohibition against women seeing other women's genitalia, this does often occur, as when women pay a visit to a waxing salon. The ways in which women regulate their bodies cannot be understood outside of the culture of *mahremiyet* since their sexed bodies have been constructed through it. However, there are ways in which they also negotiate these regulations, as I demonstrate in the following pages.

The Living Borders of Mahremiyet

"Do you know what mahrem is? It is a secret and a seal. It is private." (Feray)^{xi}

Sibel was a single woman in her late twenties and was working toward a doctoral degree in dentistry during the time of this research. As a young single woman with a respectable job and in higher education who lived in a suburban area of Istanbul (Beşyüzevler), she considered herself a more "*aydın*" (enlightened) woman compared to her family members and her neighbors. Indeed, Sibel was the "perfect" modern Turkish woman: tall, skinny, natural-looking blonde hair, often wearing tight pants and miniskirts with an academic career. She was, by no means, a traditional or religious woman, both in her own accounts, and within circulating stereotypes in Istanbul.

The way Sibel explained her choice of a women-only space for her aerobics-fitness class is worth examining as a whole:

Well, in the end, you stretch your legs, spread your legs, lie down, and raise your feet. Your body may be revealed. In the end, you would be surrounded by people you don't know which is discomfoting in my opinion. I mean, I wouldn't feel comfortable. For instance, your trainer tells you to spread your legs and I wouldn't want to do that, I would be uncomfortable. Or, for instance, you wear sweatpants and do the cycling movement with your feet up and you will have to worry about your t-shirt coming off, and you will have to worry about your sweatpants coming off, and you will try to stuff it into your socks. Why should I have to have all these concerns? [...] I don't feel comfortable at all. I don't want to do aerobics movements when I am with people I don't know. [...] Why would I do such bedroom movements? I don't want to.

Sibel's example elaborates on the shared aspect of the culture of *mahremiyet*. Her words reflect three layers of *mahremiyet*. The first, most obvious, level corresponds with the bodily movements she avoids in the presence of foreign (non-*mahrem*) men. Her concern is not about all men or just any men, but by men that she does not know. What she refers to as "bedroom movements" is the resemblance between the body movements of a woman during an act of sexual intercourse and those of a woman exercising. Her lack of desire to exercise with people she does not know is based on this resemblance, and the way it may appear for a foreign man. She wants to be safe from anyone imagining or fantasizing about her body, and therefore, in order to avoid the heteroerotics of the movements, she avoids exercising in public.

On another level is her depiction of aerobics as "bedroom movements." She does not directly say that the movements are sexual. Instead she refers to the closed doors space of the bedroom in which such movements should or could occur. She uses what Najmabadi (1993) calls an *invisible metaphoric veiled language* of the "newly produced woman" of modernity

(489). Different from the cases Najmabadi shares in her work, however, Sibel is not trying to establish a physically removed veil with her language. Instead, she uses a legitimized symbolic language to refer to the heteroerotics of her body, through which she maintains an everyday control of her public sexuality.

A third *mahrem* layer reveals itself when Sibel explains, very vividly, that what pushes the boundaries of sexuality is not simply limited to the content of the bodily movement. Despite proper clothing, through movement the body has the potential to be revealed and the outfit to become less controllable. Sibel complains about her uncontrollable sweatpants. This third layer highlights the possibilities of losing control through movement, which for Sibel is exemplified through clothing and her explanation of how in exercise, there is always a loss of control of clothing that could expose sexualized body parts.

Gül, another interlocutor, also provided a detailed description of how it is difficult to control her outfit when exercising and how women-only gyms saved her from having to make these detailed calculations. She was a forty-one-year-old married woman with two children and worked as a manager in an international corporation. Gül is a member of two gyms and works out in both women-only and mixed gyms. In the gated community where she lived at the time, she had access to a gym with separate hours for women and men (Yeşilvadi/YV). During the hours YV was open for men only, Gül would go to a mixed gym not far from her home. When I asked her to compare the two gyms, she first compared their provided services, such as towel provision and swimsuit drying machines. She then moved on to describing levels of “comfort” and discomfort:

There is an advantage here (YV), which, of course, is a disadvantage for some others: men and women are segregated. You are more comfortable. For instance, when you need to exercise, you don't go all “Oh, have my underpants gone between my hips? Oh, has my underwear appeared over the top [of my sweatpants]? Oh, did the neck of my top show my breasts when I bent over?” You have to check each and every one of these things [in a mixed gym]. “Oh I'm sweating, is my shirt sticking to my body too much?” So yes, you need to have a certain level of mahremiyet between men and women. You don't have to worry about these when there aren't any men around.

Gül did not wear a headscarf, and, as part of her professional life, the attire she usually preferred were sleeveless shirts under jackets and skirts worn just above her knees. Yet, exercise, when her body begins to move, makes this or any other choice in clothing uncontrollable and thus uncomfortable. She then feels obliged to pay attention to her bare back and tummy exposed by her bunched-up t-shirt.

Neither Gül nor Sibel are headscarf-wearing women; both consider themselves to be modern, secular Turkish women. Yet again, the culture of *mahremiyet* goes beyond covering and segregation. It is, more broadly, a multi-layered boundary-making mechanism of privacy and sexuality that women live through, within, and with which they negotiate. Being objected to other institutions of intimacy, women in several Euro-American contexts may have similar concerns. However, the particularity of the context we witness here is not only about the ways in which the link between the public and the intimate is constructed differently in each sociality, but also about the significance of the *gazze*. What both Gül and Sibel avoid is

“*frikik*,” referring to the “free kick” movement in football, a highly masculine zone. In football a free kick allows the player to score directly. But when a woman performs the movement, she loses the control of her outfit and reveals parts of her body that she normally tries to keep concealed (i.e. her legs). She also loses control of her (guarded) sexuality, leaving her with a feeling of shame, of unwanted public nudity. This movement allows a potential (foreign/non-*mahrem*) male gaze to see something he was not supposed to see. So, figuratively, he “scores” against the woman who was trying to guard (part of) her body. By avoiding this movement, both Gül and Sibel disallow victory to the opposite sex. While Sibel wears knee-length skirts often and is not necessarily concerned with men seeing her legs, the avoidance of these kinds of movements in non-sex segregated spaces causes worry about control.

During this research my informants were often less able to describe their discomfort. In fact, unlike Gül and Sibel, very few women were able to provide a vivid description of how they control their sexuality in public. 30-year-old Elif had taken her Islamic headscarf off four years ago after wearing it for more than a decade. This experience allowed her to compare her concerns during her headscarf-wearing years with her concerns today. She says

“Many women, veiled or not, already prefer to cover their private parts and protect them from men’s eyes. When you are running, you do not want your tits to be jumping around in front of men. This is also a cultural thing.”^{xiii}

Because it is a “cultural thing,” the content of the “*comfort*,” was often inexplicable for many of the women I interviewed. This sense of comfort is so deeply embedded into their lives, that asking them to explain their discomfort often sounded unnecessary to them. Seval was another non-scarved young career woman. She was in her early 30s and also single. She came from “a traditional family” in her words, reflecting the way traditional discourse is tied to religion and rural culture, and referred to herself as “progressive modern” (*çağdaş modern*). “*It’s something you learn from your family, and on the streets*” she said about her discomfort in exposing herself through certain bodily movements and dressing in a particular way in the presence of men. Seval’s reference to “*the streets*” concerns highly inter-subjective relations in the public sphere, where interactions are built through multiple means, but overwhelmingly through the gaze. This is what Alev Çınar (2005) terms the “public gaze,” arguing that since public space is loaded with meanings, interactions, debates, contestations, identities, and subjectivities, the public gaze dominates that sphere at multiple levels of encroachment (2005: 34).

I asked Seval to explain her discomfort in relation to gaze:

Sertaç : *Do you restrain yourself because men look at you? Or because you are used to it?*

Seval : *That can be a reason too. I mean we are raised to behave properly as women and girls in the presence of men, like subconsciously. It doesn’t really matter if you look açık (open/uncovered) and comfortable, you are careful because it’s engrained in your culture. That’s why I am content to exercise with women.*^{xiiii}

Headscarf-wearing women in Turkey are sometimes called *kapalı*, a term which signifies both covered and closed. *Kapalı* also refers to being modest, or closed to flirtation and

seduction. Women who do not wear a headscarf are called *açık*, meaning both uncovered and open. Seval does not say “*if you are açık*”, she says “*if you look açık*” because she does not believe that she is made less modest by not wearing a headscarf.

Seval’s awareness of regulating her sexuality in public echoes Najmabadi’s (1993) analysis of the transformation of Iranian women from all-female homosocial to heterosocial spaces. During Reza Shah’s mandate for compulsory unveiling in 1930 (513), women began to develop strategies to discipline their sexuality by other means to maintain cross-sex barriers. Najmabadi provides the example of “walk(ing) to work facing the walls” (513) as one of these strategies. Thus, she argues “in its movement from a homosocial female-bounded world into a heterosocial public space, the female body was itself transformed,” including women’s voluntary adaptation of an “invisible metaphoric veil, *hijab-i’iffat* (veil of chastity), not as some object, a piece of cloth, external to the female body, but [...] a disciplined modern body that obscured the woman’s sexuality, obliterated its bodily presence” (489).

Unveiled and yet pure, the new Turkish women of the Early Republican Period were also expected to be “modern” in appearance and intellect but were still required to preserve the “traditional” virtue of chastity and to affirm it constantly (Durakbaşı 1988, Parla 2001). Seval’s everyday negotiations and strategies reflect how she maneuvers through the demands of patriarchal mechanisms, whereby she states that despite her looks, she in fact maintains the norms of public sexuality.

Other women, regardless of whether or not they wear a headscarf, echo Seval’s concern. This suggests that in Turkey’s cultural expectations of public sexuality, women need to learn how not to look accessible, or, in their words, “*açık*” or “*rahat*” (literally, comfortable). The following example is from Mübeccel, a headscarf-wearing woman, who was also single and a freshman at a local university. I met Mübeccel at the municipally run Hamza Yerlikaya Sports Center. She was one of the many respondents who shared long lists of details regarding how they regulated their bodies and attitudes “*dışarıda*” (out in the public). During our conversation, Mübeccel directly pointed out these limits, when she said:

Mübeccel: In the end, I am covered [headscarved] and should know where to draw the line. [...]

Sertaç : So how do you know where to draw your line? How do you do that?

Mübeccel: With my attitudes and behaviors... Sure, I do everything when I’m with women. I mean, everything, like I wear low necklines and do this and that. But when I go out, I pay attention to my behavior, for instance. When I walk or talk, for instance, I don’t laugh dışarıda (outside). There’s this thing, like my character. I am never too close to men for instance [thinks for a moment]. Actually I have a tough character dışarıda, did you know that? People who see me dışarıda usually think “what a tough girl” about me.

Dışarıda does not immediately refer to being in public but to the non-domestic sphere that is both non-familial and heterosocial. *Dışarıda* indicates mixed-gender public spheres, such as streets, public transportation, and school campuses, perhaps with the exception of special occasions such as weddings where people are known and familiar to a certain extent.

Mübeccel comes from a lower social class background and when she says *dışarıda*, she refers to the neighborhoods of her class where she encounters, in various proximities, foreign males all the time. Her experience differs from women I talked to from the middle-upper and upper classes. She takes public transportation to go to school and walks on the streets of lower-class suburbs of Istanbul, while women from these other social classes told me that they walk only in “sterilized” public spaces, such as upper-class neighborhoods or shopping malls. Thus, in order to rebuild the distance Mübeccel needs in a heterosocial public space (of predominantly middle-lower class people), she has developed a body language and a series of attitudes that help her have the affective influence she needs. The lines she draws *dışarıda*, outside, are invisible boundaries. She avoids looking easy or *rahat* (comfortable), and expresses a “tough” look. These lines are there to prevent further complications she may encounter. She explains:

I am not tough in my real life... I need to appear as serious (ciddî), that's how it's supposed to be. Time and environment are corrupted (referring to the rising sexual harassment). I mean, what would they think if I laugh? They could derive multiple meanings from that laughter.^{xiv}

Mübeccel knows not only what kind of a message she needs to give through her public appearance and performance, but also *how* to manifest it. Mübeccel's control of her behavior in public is shaped with reference to an imagined gaze that not only monitors, but also judges, evaluates, criticizes, and approves. It is also worth mentioning that Mübeccel's headscarf, or her *kapalı* look, does not save her from any of these calculations^{xv}. She still calculates the effects of her acts and her looks, which demands a constant sense self-consciousness, through which she continuously evaluates the appropriateness of her role and potential threats or misunderstandings. Thus, the culture of *mahremiyet* works almost exclusively against women's privacies. Therefore, women feel obliged to ensure that their boundaries are not going to be broken.

Morning Exercises in the Parks: Public by Nature, Private by Culture

Even if a ten-week gym membership - at 10 Turkish liras (less than \$3.5) - is financially feasible - open air exercise with no fee was still compelling for several women I talked to. This was both for financial reasons and because some enjoyed outdoor exercise. If women's privacies were so fragile, then what sort of strategies did they use to guard their boundaries and to establish *comfort* while they exercised in a public park, I wondered. How does the culture of *mahremiyet* take shape in mixed and public spaces?

Middle-aged and senior women, walking with their sneakers and exercising in outdoor gyms in public parks in the early hours of the day is a familiar scene to most residents and, even visitors, of Istanbul. The trend has become mainstream. Early-bird training sessions have been initiated by Sports Inc., a subsidiary of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality established to “strengthen the physical and mental health of Istanbulites” through outdoor exercise in public parks. The (immediate) difference between women's outdoor exercise in North America, the UK or continental Europe and in Istanbul is in their appearance. Rather than tight-fitting athletic clothing, women in Istanbul who are exercising outdoors often

dress in casual, loose-fitting clothing, sometimes wear robes or even black veils that cover the whole body, and sneakers (Figure 1). But there are less visible differences as well.



Figure 1: Women walking in a public park in loose outfits.

Photo Credit: Sertaç Sehlikoglu

Sports Inc.'s early-bird training sessions are part of a project called "Morning Sports" in 31 locations across the city, with multiple sessions for some of these spots. In Fatih, for instance, a majority Islamic neighborhood of Istanbul, there are two outdoor exercise sessions—one at 7 AM and the other at 8 AM—due to high demand from women.^{xvi} Sports Inc. employs and sends (predominantly female) trainers who are graduates of sports academies to sports centers across various neighborhoods. Selim Terzi, the vice-president of Sports Inc. told me that the sessions were offered "*upon demand*."^{xvii}

The early-bird exercise sessions require bodily movements that immediately trigger issues related to the makings of heteroerotics. These bodily movements include running which involves the movement of hips and breasts, stretching that may emphasize the contour of the body, and leg movements that draw attention to the genitalia. As such, they were often considered by my informants as highly sexual, even erotic. The eroticization of exercising female bodies can be observed in Turkish popular culture. Women's volleyball has long been perceived as a "leg show," for example. In the 1970s all-male audiences regularly harassed female volleyball players of national teams (Harani 2001, Sehlikoglu 2015c). In the early 1990s, when private television broadcasting emerged, the nighttime erotic show performed by Yasemin Evcim was popularly referred to as *gece jimnastiği* (night gymnastics). Even today, Turkish pilates guru Ebru Şallı's videos on YouTube are subject to sexualized comments of male viewers. Indeed, in Sultançiftliği, where I conducted my ethnography, on the request of women participants morning exercise sessions were eventually moved to an indoor facility,

due to the gaze of men. In other words, the discomfort caused by the foreign male gaze resulted in a demand for a segregated, indoor space.^{xviii} Going back to Mübecce's calculations in a nearby (equally lower-middle-class) neighborhood in her everyday life, women's demand for indoor space for exercise comes as no surprise.^{xix}

Besides the sessions offered by Sports Inc., women walk and do light exercise in small groups in public parks. This is an emergent trend and not a privately initiated project. The practice has become so popular in recent years that municipal governments have re-designed many public parks, installing walking paths as well as outdoor gym equipment (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Women using outdoor gym equipment in Cumhuriyet Park. Faces not exposed to honor the requests of the women to remain anonymous. **Photo Credit:** Sertaç Sehlíkoglu

Outdoor gym equipment in these public parks include cross-trainers, leg, shoulder and chest-presses, benches, as well as equipment to work out arms and shoulders like hand-bikes and shoulder-wheels^{xx}. In a park near the Hamza Yerlikaya Sports Center, women almost take over the park in the hours as early as the time of morning prayer – sunrise - until 9 or 10 AM, depending on the season. By “taking over,” I mean that they not only outnumber men, but that they determine the ways in which male patrons of the park behave during their time there.

Even though women do not do “bedroom movements” as part of their exercise in public and do not stretch, run, or (for the most part) dress in tight clothes, they can still become targets of, albeit in limited numbers, harassing ogles. With constant reference to an imagined (if not actual) foreign male gaze in public, women's sexuality is rebuilt and internalized daily to reproduce normative boundaries.

Figen, a woman in her 40s who regularly exercised in this park, revealed in an interview the way the way in which in her mind the looks of “everyone” and “men” are in fact interconnected:

- Sertaç : *What bothers you in a mixed [gender] environment?*
- Figen : [Slightly surprised with the question, almost finding it irrelevant and the answer too obvious] *To be out in the open (öyle açıkta olmak)! I don't know, I would be spreading my legs and raising my arms while men are passing by, out in the public (dışarıda), on the street [sokak ortasında, literally "in the middle of the street"]*. *Everyone would turn and look at you. It would bother me if everybody were to look at me!*
- Sertaç : *When you say everybody, do you mean men?*
- Figen : *Yes, men.*^{xxi}

Figen's few sentences are haunted by boundaries, outsiders, discomfort, and open-ness. Her reference to "everybody" as a source of discomforting gaze is not hollow. On the contrary, when Figen says "everybody," she refers to the potential of a male gaze evaluating her public acts. Evaluation and judgment of this kind is independent from the gender of the looker as it marks Figen as a woman. In other words, the gaze, whether by a man or a woman, places judgment on the person who is its object, making her a woman who exercises in the (potential) presence of an actual foreign male gaze. Like Mübeccel, she refers to the opinions and judgments about herself that lie behind the gaze. Figen feels *uncomfortable* exercising outside of her *mahrem* zone; in her words, "*out in the public, in the middle of the street*", sites loaded with unpredictable, foreign, and violating interventions.

Likewise, Kamile, a 36-year-old lower-class housewife and mother of two, decided to become a member of a women-only gym a couple of weeks after she began to exercise in her neighborhood. She lives in Cumhuriyet Mahallesi, a suburban part of Istanbul that is home to mostly middle to lower-income families, most of whom are first-generation migrants from different parts of Turkey. The park there is very small, about 20 m² with five outdoor exercise machines. It has no trees and no rubber walking paths so Kamile needed to walk on the streets, circling around the park, and use the equipment where any passer-by could see her. In Kamile's experience, she was visible in public and therefore, more vulnerable. She complained about the actual male gaze staring at her moving body.

- Kamile : *We used to start and continue for one or two months and then take a break. And maybe we would start again. One naturally hesitates when there's no one else [to accompany her when she exercises]. Also, Sultançiftliği (her old neighborhood) is more rural [kırsal, referring to the area's mostly rural immigrant population] compared to here [Cumhuriyet Mahallesi].*
- Sertaç : *How so?*
- Kamile : *You go out to exercise alone in the morning and everybody gawks at you like a moron [bön bön bakmak], men and all. You cannot do it alone. There's nobody [doing sports] there. It's not like here.*
- Sertaç : *Yes, you are right, you need to have someone to accompany you.*
- Kamile : *Exactly!*

I asked her to further describe her discomfort:

At the beginning, I did not feel comfortable while I was walking in the park. Your hips move and there are men around you. I especially cannot be free with the equipment where you should open and close your legs [referring to the inner legs trainer]. Men look especially when we are on the trainers in the park. I hate them! Women have to argue with men who sit on purpose right across women to watch women. Actually, security deals with them but they return again after an hour.^{xxii}

The aforementioned segregation draws a boundary between women's bodies and male strangers and regulates verbal and non-verbal (i.e. the gaze) cues. These very same limits also turn women's bodies into strange objects in the public sphere. Particular types of exercises - in Kamile's case, opening and closing legs in the sitting position - include bodily movements that cannot be performed without concern in the presence of the *non-mahrem* male gaze, as these movements resemble acts of sexual intimacy. The "penetrating" aspect of the gaze is a result of a combination of factors, including the looker's attitude and the tactility of the gaze. Therefore, the discomfort caused by the penetrating foreign male gaze parallels the feeling of harassment. Moreover, this gaze, unlike a physical or verbal harassment, is not a concrete act of violence and cannot be prevented, stopped, or reported despite the disturbance it causes. Therefore, Kamile needed to develop strategies to negotiate it.

Kamile's discomfort and initial impotency to street harassment (by gazing) exposes how easily and randomly women's bodies can be turned into public matters, and the fragility of their privacies. Because of the power dynamics embedded into the very fabric of heterosexual duality in Turkey, women's privacies are always more fragile than men's (Sehlikoglu 2013, 2015b). For women, the ways in which at any moment their bodies can be made public is experienced as risk. This, in fact, is the nexus of the problem for women when it comes to exercising in public. Whether they are followers of the Islamic faith, are veiled or not, self-identify as modern or traditional does not necessarily change this experience of risk. This problem cannot even be reduced to being subject to the male gaze, or patriarchal control. While these all may be aspects of the larger felt problem, what women really worry about on a day-to-day basis is the instability of what may occur at any moment during exercise because of the fragility of their privacies. A woman can be, at any moment, caught by that instability and troubled by it, through violation of her privacy. A word, an insistent gaze that touches, or in some cases a physical touch leaves room for potential instability and thus harm.

Like the experiences of women I discuss above (Elif, Belgin, Seval, and Sibel), Kamile also draws attention to the same bodily movements, or *bedroom* movements. But, due to her limited financial income and the fees required for a women-only gym, Kamile exercises outdoors from time to time, which places her "bedroom movements" into encounter with the (non-*mahrem*) male gaze in the public, heterosocial sphere. A man sits right across Kamile to watch her as she opens and closes her legs. She performs a *mahrem* act, meant to be private, while the man takes advantage of its public performance. While Kamile described this incident, all of us, three adult women present for this conversation, had a clear idea about the look in the harasser's eyes. Kamile mimicked the erotic pleasure of his gaze. "When

it first happened, I felt so angry [...] I was ashamed. I couldn't do anything," Kamile explained. She initially tried to confront it by calling security, yet this did not seem to provide a solution. She shrugged her shoulders and added, *"then I learned to ignore it [...]* Now, I think that we do not know each other, so never mind!"

These words reveal a process in which she agentively unlearns the *mahrem* borders and the feeling of privacy that comes with them. Instead of maintaining and guarding *her* mahrem borders, she begins ignoring them. In the culture of *mahremiyet* - which situates males as active and penetrating, juxtaposed with the passive female, as penetrated - ignoring this penetrating foreign male gaze is not a simple act, but the ability to do so enables the woman to steal the power of penetration away from her harasser (Sehlikoglu 2015a).

Kamile underwent a personal transformation as evinced by her ability to ignore a much significant and powerful male gaze. As she moved up from Sultançiftliği, a more suburban (rural, in her words) neighborhood, to a less suburban, more city-like and "progressive" neighborhood, she changed her attitudes, her body movements, and her exercise routine. By using the gaze as a gauge, she evaluated her new environment and coordinated her body accordingly. She was aware of the pedagogic aspect of her environment, but also the stakes of the "ethico-aesthetics of a body's capacity for becoming" (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 14). What I would like to highlight here is not how she evaluates the conditions in her new neighborhood or how she negotiates them. Rather, what is important here is the ways in which she creatively uses all of the possibilities and options as part of her transformation and her self-formation without *directly* challenging the culture of *mahremiyet* while indirectly blurring the borders within it.



Figure 3: Women's exercise often begins with a fast walk, followed by work-out on the equipment. There are only two men in this photo: one is walking against the stream (Zeki in the blue T-Shirt) and another comes with his spouse. Cumhuriyet Park. **Photo Credit:** Sertaç Sehlikoglu

Exercising in Public Parks

When women take over a park, however, the situation changes, and the culture of *mahremiyet* starts acting against male patrons who thereby feel obliged to control their own public sexualities. They start worrying about how they would be perceived by attending the park that is ordinarily a heterosocial space. In Cumhuriyet Park, for example, frequented by two of my interlocutors during in the summer because of financial restrictions in getting access to an indoor gym, a curious spectacle takes place. The photo above (Figure 3) was taken in the Cumhuriyet Park in Sultanciftliği. As it illustrates, there are usually very few male patrons who come to the park simply to watch women's moving bodies, or to meet with women. More often, men either come to exercise with their wives or by themselves, but this is also quite rare. Thus, spotting men who are there for gazing becomes very easy, and a frequent subject of women's disdainful conversations. As such, there is a public consensus about the "intentions" of male patrons present in the park early in the morning. Women refer to the males who are present in the park only to exercise – and not to watch or harass women – as those with "pure/untainted intentions" (*saf/temiz niyet*). Yet, those with "untainted intentions" need to demonstrate this in a public manner. In the photo above, one can spot two male patrons who are in the park with "untainted intentions", solely to exercise. In order to make sure that they will not be misunderstood, they have either come to the park with a female relative (the gentleman with the cap walking with the lady in black), or, if that is not possible - as in the case of Zeki (in the blue t-shirt) - they walk against the stream so that women can see where they are looking. That is to say, Zeki feels obliged to prove that he is not there to stare at women's moving bodies (from behind) and to do so he adopts this practice of facing them. In a way, he proves that women are "safe" from his gaze. One aspect of performing proper public Islamicate sexuality necessitates limiting the *mahrem* body. Another, however, is necessitates limiting the penetrating gaze. This is what Zeki, a retired high-school teacher, was doing in Cumhuriyet Park.

Conclusion:

The daily techniques women use to build boundaries between themselves and the "foreign" opposite sex are pivotal elements of public sexuality and its culture of segregation. The call for a feminist investigation of women's daily gendered negotiations with respect to cross-sex relations fits nicely into Afsaruddin's (1999) attention to the gap in feminist studies. Afsaruddin calls for a more diligent study, "a dispassionate, nuanced look" that does not over-focus on women's attire, which inevitably overlooks the ways in which women "appropriate public space and assert their presence" (14). Afsaruddin's call for a non-essentialist gender analysis is partly influenced by McNay's (1992) interrogation of Foucauldian theory and feminism's non-differentiated remarks that neglect cultural, historical, temporal, and geographical shades, leaving women's experience "either not understood in their full complexity, [...] devalued or [...] obscured altogether" (64). This problem exists within scholarship on Turkey, which include an impressive number of studies

on the issue of veiling, the headscarf and visible Islam. Although there are significant and ground-breaking works among them, this dominant interest and obsession has obfuscated alternative probes on Islamicate gender practices in the public sphere and women's appropriation of public space.

There are multiple factors that lie behind the ways in which women organize their bodily movements in multiple spaces, which constitutes a multi-layered process of building privacy, heterosexuality, and intimacy. These layers are established through cultural scripts (heteroerotics), structural fixations (class and religion), normative spaces, and gendered acts (Ze'evi 2006). Through analyzing women's management of their bodies in relation to public sexuality and public visibility, I have aimed to shed light on the ways in which selfhood, gender, and body are linked together in Islamicate contexts.

I have connected women's strict management of their bodies to larger schemes, such as the culture of *mahremiyet* as it operates in various aspects of life. Women's relationship with this culture, as *mahrem* bodies in it, involves several layers of calculations and risks due to the instability and fragility of women's privacies. In this context of "approachability," women employ various techniques to avoid the instability of *mahrem* zones, often also avoiding the foreign male gaze altogether and sometimes intervening on this gaze by confrontation. Thus, women reimagine, recreate and negotiate their privacies through everyday forms of contestation. Within any moment, their privacy risks becoming public, which can result in a feeling of violation. Sexual harassment is just one of the many moments that signify this risk of private becoming public. In other words, the culture of *mahremiyet* concerns the very fabric that produces normalcy, or "comfort," defining the boundaries between private and public and illustrating the penetrability of those borders.

However, women are far from docile objects in the culture of *mahremiyet* no matter how fragile their privacy is in that culture. As the case of Kamile demonstrates, by taking arbitrary risks women exhibit agentive responses and often create ruptures in this culture. The rupture is even more visible in the case of Cumhuriyet Park, where women have reversed the power dynamics of *mahremiyet* by "taking over" the park. As such, *mahremiyet* operates in their favor. While women may not be taking bold risks or directly challenging or resisting existing systems^{xxiii} as they avoid random violations of their privacies, they nevertheless test the limits of the culture of *mahremiyet* and negotiate these boundaries. They indirectly change the dynamics, when they ignore the power of the male gaze, or take over a park^{xxiv}.

This article has also examined Istanbulite women's control of their bodily movements in public spaces, analyzing these movements as parts of a multi-layered process of building privacy, heterosexuality, and intimacy. I have argued that the demand for privacy (*mahremiyet*) has created regulated spaces and institutions of intimacy. At one level, Istanbulite women's concerns and demands for segregation shed light on discussions in social studies about Muslim women's visibilities, modesty concerns, dress codes, and public sexuality. Different forms of modesty are established in the community through various techniques (Antoun 1968, Werbner 2007) including veiling, segregation, the use of language, as well as behaviors - such as body language, sitting, walking, laughing appropriately, and posture. These

techniques are related to the ways in which “*mahremiyet*” is defined, made and remade in daily life, as part of what Berlant terms “institutions of intimacy” (Berlant 1998). Such perspective is particularly crucial in developing conceptual tools to identify the ways in which normalcies are created and reinforced through institutions of intimacy, which extends beyond female bodied persons (Zengin 2011), and may also include young or gay men (Korkman 2015, Özbay 2010). It also contributes to an important recognition of similarities with other, non-Islamicate, institutions of intimacy (Lazaridis 1995, Agathangelou 2004).

Acknowledgments: This article is part of a larger study that has benefited from William-Wyse Fieldwork Grant from the University of Cambridge, The Abdullah Mubarak BRISMES (British Institute of Middle Eastern Studies) Scholarship, and a research grant from the British Institute at Ankara (BIAA). I would also like to thank Henrietta L. Moore, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Giulia Liberatore, and Ertuğ Altınay for providing invaluable comments on earlier versions of this paper.

References

- Afsaruddin, Asma. 1999. "Introduction: Hermeneutics and honor: Negotiating female public space in Islamic/ate societies." In *Hermeneutics and honor: Negotiating female public space in Islamic/ate societies*, edited by Asma Afsaruddin, 1-28. Cambridge, MA: Harvard CMES.
- Agathangelou, Anna M. 2004. *The global political economy of sex: Desire, violence, and insecurity in Mediterranean nation states*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alloula, Malek. 1986. *The Colonial Harem*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Antoun, Richard T. 1968. "On the Modesty of Women in Arab Muslim Villages: A Study in the Accommodation of Traditions." *American Anthropologist* 70 (4):671-697.
- Babayan, Kathryn. 2008. "‘In Spirit We Ate Each Other’s Sorrow’: Female Companionship in Seventeenth-Century Safavi Iran." In *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, edited by Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, 239-74. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies.
- Babayan, Kathryn, and Afsaneh Najmabadi. 2008. *Islamicate sexualities: Translations across temporal geographies of desire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard CMES.
- Berlant, Lauren Gail. 1998. "Intimacy: A special issue." *Critical Inquiry* 24 (2):281-288.
- Berlant, Lauren Gail, and Michael Warner. 1998. "Sex in public." *Critical Inquiry*:547-566.
- Booth, Marilyn, ed. 2010. *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Brav, Aaron. 1992. "The evil eye among the Hebrews." In *The evil eye: a casebook*, edited by Alan Dundes, 44-54.
- Brown, Jo. 2011. "The Athenian harem: Orientalism and the historiography of Athenian women in the nineteenth century." *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies* 6:1-12.
- Coss, Richard G. 1974. "Reflections on the Evil Eye." *Human Behavior* 3 (10):16-22.

- Durakbaşı, Ayşe. 1988. "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu." *Tarih Toplum* 51:37-48.
- Göle, Nilüfer. 1996. *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.
- Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J Seigworth. 2010. *The affect theory reader*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books.
- Harani, Yavuz. 2001. "Türk Kadının Sporla İmtihanı (The Challenge of Women with Sports)." *Hürriyet*, 13 January. webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2001/01/13/282581.asp.
- İlkkaracan, Pınar. 2000. *Women and sexuality in Muslim societies: Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR)/Kadının İnsan Hakları Projesi (KİHP)*.
- Johnson, Clarence Richard. 1924. "The Evil Eye and Other Superstitions in Turkey." *Journal of Applied Sociology* 9:259-68.
- Keyder, Caglar. 1987. "State and class in Turkey." *London and New York*.
- Korkman, Zeynep Kurtulus. 2015. "Feeling Labor Commercial Divination and Commodified Intimacy in Turkey." *Gender & Society*:0891243214566269.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1981. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: Norton.
- Lad, Jateen. 2010. "Panoptic Bodies: Black Eunuchs as Guardians of The Topkapı Harem." In *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*, edited by Marilyn Booth. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Lazaridis, Gabriella. 1995. "Sexuality and its cultural construction in rural Greece." *Journal of Gender Studies* 4 (3):281-295.
- McNay, Lois. 1992. *Foucault and Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. "Colonising Egypt. 1988." *Berkeley: U of California P*.
- Moore, Henrietta L. 1988. *Feminism and Anthropology*. Cambridge: Polits.
- Moore, Henrietta L. 1994. *A Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mulvey, Laura. 1975. "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema." *Media and Cultural Studies*:342.
- Özbay, Cenk. 2010. "Nocturnal queers: Rent boys' masculinity in Istanbul." *Sexualities* 13 (5):645-663.
- Ozyegin, Gul. 2009. "Virginal Facades Sexual Freedom and Guilt among Young Turkish Women." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 16 (2):103-123.
- Parla, Ayse. 2001. "The "honor" of the state: virginity examinations in Turkey." *Feminist studies*:65-88.
- Peirce, Leslie P. 1993. *The imperial harem: Women and sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. Oxford University Press New York.
- Sehlikoglu, Sertaç. 2013. "Vaginal obsessions in Turkey: an Islamic perspective." *Open Democracy (Gender Politics Religion)*:50:50.
- Sehlikoglu, Sertaç. 2015a. "The Daring Mahrem: Changing Dynamics of Public Sexuality in Turkey." In *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures*, edited by Gul Ozyegin, 235-252. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate.

- Sehlikoglu, Sertaç. 2015b. "Public Intimacies, Intimate Publics: Natural Limits, Creation and the Culture of Mahremiyet in Turkey." *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33 (2).
- Sehlikoglu, Sertaç. 2015c. "Contestation and Dichotomies Concerning Women's Bodies and Sports in Turkey: From Aysun Özbek to Neslihan Darnel" in *Sport in Islam and in Muslim Communities* by Alberto Testa, Mahfoud Amara (Eds), Taylor and Francis (187-202).
- Sharokni, Nazanin. 2014 'The Mothers' Paradise: Women-only Parks and the Dynamics of State Power in Iran. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 10(3):87-108.
- Simon, William, and John H Gagnon. 1986. "Sexual scripts: Permanence and change." *Archives of sexual Behavior* 15 (2):97-120.
- Smith-Hefner, Nancy J. 2006. "Reproducing respectability: sex and sexuality among Muslim Javanese youth." *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 40 (1):143.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1990. *The gender of the gift: problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia*: Univ of California Press.
- Watson, Beccy, and Sheila Janet Scraton. 2013. "Leisure studies and intersectionality." *Leisure Studies* 32 (1):35-47.
- Werbner, Pnina. 2007. "Veiled interventions in pure space honour, shame and embodied struggles among Muslims in Britain and France." *Theory, culture & society* 24 (2):161-186.
- Yanagisako, Sylvia Junko, and Jane Fishburne Collier. 1987. "Toward a unified analysis of gender and kinship." *Gender and kinship: Essays toward a unified analysis*:14-50.
- Yeğenoğlu, Meyda. 1998. *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zengin, Aslı. 2011. *İktidarın mahremiyeti: İstanbul'da bayat kadınları, seks işçiliği ve şiddet*: Metis.
- Ze'evi, Dror. 2006. *Producing desire: changing sexual discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900*. Vol. 52: Univ of California Press.

ⁱ None of my interlocutors were living below poverty.

ⁱⁱ Class differences are not as sharp in Turkey as they are, for instance, in the UK. I define class based on income, occupation and lifestyle. Lower-class is used for blue-collar workers (and their wives). Middle class is SME owners and white-collar workers, including doctors and engineers (and their wives). Upper-class refers to the employers of white-collar workers (and their wives). For an extensive study on the formation of class in Turkey, please refer to Keyder 1987.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kemalism is the official secular and nationalist ideology of Turkey, promoting the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic.

^{iv} Women's demand for women-only space has both parallels as well as particularities when compared to other women-only gyms and leisure spaces in the non-Muslim world. As I elaborate in this article, women-only gyms simultaneously translate into spaces that are freed from the male gaze - suggesting the centrality of the gaze to concerns regarding privacy – which is not necessarily the case in Western gyms where there are male janitors, trainers or security guards overseeing the security cameras.

^v For other works examining changing forms of sexuality in Islamic contexts, please refer to Ozyegin (2009) and Smith-Hefner (2006).

^{vi} For further information and anthropological analysis of different forms of milk kinship and its relation to *mahrem* relationships in Muslim societies, please refer to Altorki (1986), Clarke (2007), Parkes (2005) and vom Bruck (1997).

-
- ^{vii} The regulations on seeing in Islamic contexts in relation to sexuality mostly discuss illicit gazing at beardless boys by adult men (See Babayan 2008: 266-267; Najmabadi 2005: 17-19; Ze'evi 2006: 97).
- ^{viii} In a similar vein, there is a feminist literature of performance studies that examines the relationship between the sexual pleasure and the gaze (Mulvey 1975).
- ^{ix} *Nazar* is often misunderstood and mistranslated into English as the “evil eye.” In fact, it refers to a strong look at another, in the form of envy as well as love.
- ^x The Middle Eastern and Eastern Mediterranean concept *nazar* originates from Arabic, but also exists in Turkish, Urdu and Farsi and their wider cultures. The rituals surrounding it have only minor variations in different ethnic and geographical contexts. According to Mitchell’s (1988) elucidation, in the context of Egypt, *nazar* refers to a certain kind of power which makes the object of the gaze more vulnerable. This belief system was referred to as “superstition” in early sociological and ethnographic works (Johnson 1924). One of the earliest works that connected the belief about the eye, gazing and its power was written by a psychologist who suggested that the overall evil eye culture stems from a particular cultural set of behaviours regarding staring and gazing (Coss 1974). After the mid-1980s, closer examinations of *nazar* emerged in ethnographic works (Brav 1992).
- ^{xi} Follow-up interview, 22nd May, 2012.
- ^{xii} Interview, 16th September 2011. Emphasis added.
- ^{xiii} Interview, 8th January 2012.
- ^{xiv} Interview, 30th December 2011.
- ^{xv} Several women who donned a headscarf told me that they needed to be more careful as they are exposed to the *gaze* even if they wear a headscarf, which, they highlight, was not the case 20 years ago. Recent works also suggest that sexuality culture in Turkey is changing (Ozyegin 2015, Sehlirkoglu 2015a) and this change should also be taken into consideration while evaluating women’s everyday worries.
- ^{xvi} Information received from Mr. Selim Terzi, vice-president of Sports Inc., during a conversation in his office in Fatih, 22nd July 2011.
- ^{xvii} Interview, 18th May, 2012.
- ^{xviii} For a good overview of sexual harassment in Turkey, see Pinar Ilkkaracan’s edited volume (2000).
- ^{xix} In some neighborhoods of Istanbul, where more privileged residents live (i.e. Caddebostan, Bebek), both women and men exercise regularly and often in regular sports outfits.
- ^{xx} Different from indoor gym equipment. these are heavier, water-resistant and less sophisticated. These spaces look like playgrounds for adults, seesaws and swing sets replaced by adult-sized exercise equipment.
- ^{xxi} Interview, 13th February 2012
- ^{xxii} Interview, 10th January, 2012
- ^{xxiii} Although my informants were not activist feminists, their everyday negotiations with the fragility of their privacy directly spoke to anti-harassment campaigns which take place quite frequently. One example directly related to the discussion above would be the recent dispute over “*müsait*” (available) as translated in the official Turkish language dictionary as “[the woman] who readily goes out or flirts”.
- ^{xxiv} A similar transformative power is observed in women-only parks in Iran, as Nazanin Shahrokni analysed in a recent work (Shahrokni 2014).